

FIREFIGHTER

JULY 2005

JUGGLING FAMILY AND WORK?

**SOMERSET
IN BALLOT ON
INSURANCE
COVER**



Let's unite on

YOU MAY have seen reports in the press from the recent round of trade union conferences. The issue of public sector pensions has been a key debate at several. The *Firefighter* goes to press as the civil servants union PCS is meeting in Brighton. PCS General Secretary Mark Serwotka warned his union that the government's pre-election promise of fresh talks could be simply be a manoeuvre. He said that if was the case then the PCS would be stepping up its campaign and seeking the involvement of all other trades unions affected by the proposed changes.

These comments reflected contributions made at our own conference by myself and by delegates. There are thirty trades unions, representing up to five million workers who are could potentially be involved in such a campaign.

I will be approaching Mark and other union leaders for discussions on the coordination of the campaign to defend our pensions. In the meantime, I urge all members and officials to ensure that the issue is being discussed in branches. Further campaign material will be produced very soon to ensure that all members are fully informed about this vital issue.

New Dimensions

At a recent national meeting, I raised the concerns of the union regarding the demands placed on the fire service by New Dimensions work i.e. the preparation for dealing with the results of potential terrorist attacks.

We are particularly concerned at the long term implications for the budgets of fire and rescue services. The new vehicles, appliances and equipment all raise new training requirements. These requirements



ANDREW BARRETT

General Secretary Matt Wrack
urges all members to ensure
that the issue of pensions
is discussed in branches

are not just short term. Fire and rescue services need to ensure that continuation training is in place. Unfortunately we have received reports that our members locally are extremely concerned about the training plans put in place. It would be completely inadequate for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to create new responsibilities, deliver new vehicles but to fail to provide the funding for the service to train employees and continue to train them.

You will also be aware of the long-running issue of the personal insurance of our members and the effects on such insurance should our members be injured or killed whilst responding to such incidents. The union has written to the government about this matter and we await a response. I know that this matter has justifiably caused a great deal of anger amongst firefighters and the government and employers have a responsibility to address those concerns urgently.

Value for money

As a new General Secretary I am keen to ensure that members are getting value for money for the subscriptions they pay. I discussed this matter with the Executive Council at its meeting in June and a number of measures were agreed which will help to put our finances on a better footing. Various aspects of expenditure will be examined to ensure that what we need to do is carried out in a cost effective way. That is not about reducing the services we provide to members. Rather it is about eliminating waste and unnecessary expense. All FBU members have the right to be sure that union officials are being extremely careful with their money.

You can rest assured. Any move to put our union on a more sound

pensions

financial footing will not have a negative impact on our ability to fight workplace campaigns on your behalf. There will simply be a new emphasis in the future of spending your money on where it counts most. We face a number of important challenges – on pensions, on regionalisation and over local cuts. We will ensure that all our resources are directed toward campaigning on these vital issues.

Goodbye and Hello

In May I resigned from the London Fire Brigade to take up my employment with the FBU. As I stated in the previous issue of Firefighter, it is a tremendous honour to have been elected General Secretary. Nevertheless there is some sadness at resigning from the fire service after 22 years. I have worked on some great watches with some real characters and will treasure my time based on east London's fire stations.

Despite the ups and downs over the years it is a job that I have greatly enjoyed and a job that I have been proud to do. Nothing can match the fire service for its close-knit sense of camaraderie. This is born out of the nature of the work we do, providing an essential and humanitarian public service. That shared experience – and the shared risks – provide the glue that binds the service together. It also provides the background to our union and to the unity we seek to build.

The fire service has always been subject to change and we are currently facing many changes in all aspects of our work. What can never be modernised away, however, is the fact that the fire service job relies on teamwork. Each individual member of the team must rely on all other members. That mutual reliance creates a culture that gives a

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unique flavour to our trade union.

Workers within the fire service have a right to be proud of their skills, knowledge and professionalism. I am determined to prevent that pride being undermined by ill-thought-out initiatives or never-ending cutbacks.

On a final note, my resignation from the LFB prompted me to recall a number of the tragedies we have experienced during my time in the service. I have witnessed the devastation brought to families of firefighters who have died at work. I have also seen the immediate and the long term affect on those who were involved but who survive. The death on duty of anyone within the service affects all of us but hits hardest those closest and most involved. I would ask you to take a moment to think of those who have died whilst carrying out their duties and of their families and friends.

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Serving the community is a real challenge for one group of members



MUHAMMAD URBABU/EMPC/SAP PHOTO

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Kurdistan firefighters in the frontline. Brian Joyce reports on the serious problems they face

Union fights Stornoway sackings

EIGHT FBU members from Stornoway retained fire stations sacked by Highland & Islands Fire Board are taking their battle for their jobs to Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson MSP.

The firefighters lost an appeal in early June heard by five Fire Board councillors, who decided to uphold the decision of the Chief Officer, on a 3 to 2 majority decision, to sack the firefighters for failing to respond to a single fire call in October last year.

All eight firefighters now intend to submit a further appeal to the Minister for Justice, Cathy Jamieson MSP.

Roddy Robertson, FBU Scottish Chair said: "This decision is unheard of. These men have



Union is appealing the decision to the Scottish Justice minister Cathy Jamieson MSP

given 130 years service to their Community.

"To be sacked for failing to notify the Brigade of their avail-

ability on this one occasion, is scandalous. There is no Brigade Instruction or indeed any recognised custom and practice, yet the Fire Board considers their actions to constitute gross misconduct. It's an absolute disgrace."

"This is on the back of seven years of managerial failures in Stornoway. The Brigade has now stated that they expect a minute to minute account of retained firefighters' availability. The detrimental consequences for all retained firefighters in Scotland are extremely worrying."

"We intend to appeal this decision to the Minister for Justice, whom we hope will apply common sense and fairness to this matter."



New Region 5 EC member

WARREN Gee has been elected as Executive Council member for Region 5 – Greater Manchester, Lancs, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside and Cheshire. He defeated Les Skarratts and David Darby by 821 votes to 541 and 421 respectively.

Warren Gee takes up the position after serving as treasurer for Region 5.

The union wishes to thank Phil Micallef, who has now retired as Region 5's EC member, for his long and committed work on behalf of FBU members.

THE union has launched a ballot for industrial action in Somerset after the fire authority refused to reverse its decision to leave the families of firefighters attending a terrorist incident bearing the financial burden of any injury or fatality. The ballot was expected to open June 27.

The move comes amid a continued failure by government to heed the union's demands that it get to grip with the lack of insurance cover for firefighters involved in responding to terrorist attacks

On behalf of FBU members, the union demanded that the fire authority confirm that in the event of death or injury arising from a terrorist incident they will make good any shortfall in payment to FBU members and their families; and that until this happens all New Dimension activity and demands on staff to participate in New Dimension is stopped.

Should the fire authority fail to conform to the Union's request a trade dispute would arise. Somerset fire authority failed to

SOMERSET MEMBERS TAKE STAND ON NEW DIMENSION

give those undertakings.

A letter from Somerset Assistant Chief Fire Officer Davis on 17 March confirmed that insurers do make exclusions in respect of terrorist incidents. But, having concluded that the risk of death or serious injury is remote, his response suggested that the financial impact of making good the resulting shortfall would be so huge that it would be unacceptable for the county to take ownership of the risk.

Somerset's Chief Fire Officer, in a letter dated 19 May 2005, confirmed that arrangements would proceed for New Dimension incidents without any insurance protection in place for members and their families.

The Union has been in correspondence with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister since March 2004 over the issue of insurance cover, but steps have

not been taken to remedy the matter.

While treating the issue of insurance cover as a low priority, the Government centrally and fire authorities locally such as Somerset have stressed the immediate and heightened risk of terrorist incidents. And they have pressed on with planning and preparation for New Dimension incidents.

Somerset members are urgently seeking confirmation that this matter will now be resolved so that they can attend terrorist incidents in the knowledge that their commitment will be recognised and their families protected in the event of death or serious injury at such incidents.

Said Leigh Redman, Chair of Somerset FBU: "Members are angry that the Chief Fire Officer still hasn't done anything to resolve the situation. We've been

raising this issue with the brigade for over a year now. We've done everything to work with them to resolve the issue. In all consultations we've had an open door policy. Yet the Fire Authority has done nothing."

Adrian Woollaston, Brigade Secretary, said: "The Government has overlooked this issue in the headlong rush to respond to 9/11."

"We can't stand by and allow our fire authority to ignore their duty of care towards their employees."

"This is a fundamental issue directly related to the health and safety of FBU members – and it impacts their families and dependents. It's the hidden sorrow. If the worse happens, the firefighters' family finds that their life insurance and indemnity policy are not valid." "It is absolutely unacceptable."

ULF Learning at Work Week

HUNDREDS of FBU members throughout the UK fire and rescue service took part at the end of May in Learning at Work Day, part of Adult Learners' week, which is the UK's largest learning campaign promoting education and training for adults, providing access to information and motivating adults to participate in education and training opportunities.

Bite size courses covering a diverse range of learning from Thai cookery to Sign language and Internet access to Beauty therapy were arranged through the work of the FBU's ULF project co-ordinators and Union Learning Reps. Staff were also given access to learndirect courses and quality information advice and guidance on their own future learning plans.

BBC learning buses fully equipped to deliver ICT taster courses also hit the road with a number of visits to fire stations around the country.

The Skills for Life agenda was prominent throughout the

week and for annual conference delegates, LAW week came a little earlier with officials accessing the National Literacy & Numeracy tests from the FBU's lifelong learning stall. The results? Failure rate for the literacy test was 65% and for numeracy 44%, many thanks to those who took the tests and just maybe it will be the spur for further learning!

In Region 13, a successful learning seminar, arranged by Bill Hendy and supported by CFO Kevin Pearson, was attended by a local MP, Chair of the Fire Authority and members of brigades within the region. Speakers included Trevor Shanahan, on behalf of the FBU, and Brian Hesler, the CFO of Northumberland FRS.

For the FBU and management this was the first year of actively working together to make learning at work week a success in the Fire Service and a lot was gained by all those taking part. Over the next few years we hope to see Learning at Work week become a fixed date in the Fire Service calendar.

100 MPs express concerns on regional controls

OVER 100 MPs have signed an Early Day Motion expressing concerns over plans to close all 46 emergency fire control rooms in England and move to nine remote regional centres.

78 MPs have signed EDM 229 calling for a full independent assessment of the plan before it proceeds, with a further 31 calling for the plan to be scrapped.

FBU General Secretary Matt Wrack said: "This is one of the most complex and difficult technology projects ever attempted. The Government's track record in major technology projects has been one of overspends, serious problems and outright failure.

"If a disaster happens in regional fire controls it will bring chaos to a rapid response 999 service

which carries out tens of thousands of rescues a year.

"That would put our lives in danger and the lives of the public in danger. Their own experts warn this project has a high risk of total failure.

"The new ministers have an opportunity to listen to those who work in the fire service and to over a hundred MPs.

"There must be a serious rethink before ministers rush into their next big technology disaster."

■ Make sure your MP has signed the EDM. Log on to the FBU's Control CARE website, www.controlcare.org.uk, follow the Lobby Your MP link and then tap in your postcode. It will find your MP's e-mail address and you can zap it off to them.



Peter Gallagher: major victory

West Mids members reject intimidation overshift system

UNION members in West Midlands showed they would not be intimidated by local employers when West Midlands Fire Authority suspended the issuing of 90-day notices it had been planning to use to impose a radical new shift system.

The brigade had threatened to issue the notices on Friday 10 June, ahead of a technical advisory panel (TAP) hearing on Tuesday 14 June.

At a mass meeting in West Midlands on May 31, FBU members expressed a willingness, if necessary, to take legal strike action to support their fight for

change to working conditions to be negotiated with the FBU, not imposed.

In early June, the FBU's Executive Council authorised a ballot for strike action in the West Midlands.

The Fire Authority's retreat, albeit temporary, came in a letter employees that stated that, as a gesture of goodwill, it would be suspending the issuing of 90 day notices until the TAP hearing.

"This is major victory for the members of West Midlands," said Peter Gallagher from the FBU in the West Midlands.

Is having a family compatible
with employment in the UK
fire and rescue
service? Firefighter
asked FBU members

“YOU WANT a family – then, when it happens, you think – oh god, what am I going to do next,” says Sue Offland, who has 27 years service in emergency fire controls behind her and two children, a 13-year old girl and an 11-year old boy.

Sue and her firefighter husband Peter are among many who have experienced the joys of family life – and the problems of balancing it with a working life in the fire service.

“Maternity leave then wasn’t as it is now. Plus, in control where you work days and nights, you didn’t have the luxury of being able to say ‘can I just do days?’. If you did it depended on control to control, brigade to brigade the answer you might get. Some of them would try to help you but in other areas there was no help.

“I – in common with lots of people – tried to work as much as I could. But then you have illnesses that come out of being pregnant, which of course aren’t looked upon too well.

“Even if you didn’t have a bad sickness record, they didn’t look upon it favourably because you had been pregnant. They didn’t seem to realise that it was one of those things that happened to women. And strangely enough most of the management side were men – and obviously their wives didn’t have children ...”

Gone are the days when responsibility for the kids was the sole role of the mother. Out of necessity and increasingly because they want to, fathers are ever more important as carers. But for Peter, as with many other male employees of the fire service, assuming that role is fraught with difficulties. Says Peter, who retired earlier this year from Merseyside Fire Authority: “There was nobody to help with our family – our parents lived too far away. The amount of stress I was under. Having the kids for nine hours on the trot between shifts is not very healthy for anybody. There was no co-operation from the brigade at all. No facility for going in early or late.”

Peter and Sue had to somehow cross paths as their shifts were changing over. First Peter would bring the kids to the fire station and after a few minutes Sue would come by to pick them up. But that went down with the brigade management like a lead balloon.



Family

“In the end we had to meet in a neighbouring car park – and I was as a result invariably late for work,” says Peter.

“Only recently, our daughter broke her arm,” adds Peter. “Sue was at work. I asked for emergency PH. But they wouldn’t give me time off to be with her, even during surgery. In the end, I was put in a very stressful position of turning up late and explaining how it happened.

Of course, kids may only be part of the equation. “As you get older, your parents are getting older too. There’s the issue of care here too. You’ve got worries about the kids on the one hand, and your own parents, on the other,” says Sue.

Adds Sue: “When my mum died, my brigade asked: ‘What do you want special leave for?’

Fortunately, attitudes and policies have improved recently, thanks to new legislation and pressure from

the FBU, say both Peter and Sue. Now Secretary of the Control Staff National Committee, Sue has for some time been promoting family friendly policies in the fire service nationally through her involvement in the National Women's Committee.

The new Grey Book (see over) includes improved statutory leave for mums and dads as well as leave for dependents other than children. It also contains provisions for flexible working, which can consist of anything from altered shift patterns, reduced hours and even an element of home working.

Yet, the Grey Book offers the minimum rights for members, says Vicky Knight, EC member for Women and a mother herself. "We consider it very much a starting point in making the service more family friendly for everyone who works in it – firefighters and control staff, officers, men and women firefighters," she says.

Local agreements that have been negotiated between employers and the FBU have extended and built upon the Grey Book provisions and that process will continue. Furthermore, brigade officials can and will always assist in requesting and negotiating improvements on members' behalf – whether you are a single parent, you are seeking flexibility because you have parental responsibilities during school holidays, you are going through the fostering or adoption processes or family-related career breaks. In addition, the National Women's Committee is there for help and advice to all members who may require it.

One big issue the FBU is working on is parental leave. "The union is campaigning under the umbrella of the TUC for parental leave to be paid. Thirteen weeks is great, but the reality is that working parents cannot afford to spend this time with their families," says Vicky.

Furthermore, with parents in the UK facing typical



Sue Offland:
Management don't seem to realise that pregnancy is one of those things that happened to women



Peter Offland: **Having the kids for nine hours on the trot between shifts is not very healthy for anybody**

alone exercise them," says Peter.

Information on policies that could make your life as a parent easier should be readily available from your brigade – and FBU members shouldn't be afraid to ask for it.

Sue's advice is to "carry your Grey Book around with you and remember you have many more rights than you may think under health and safety. And when you go to speak to brigade management, bring somebody with you – ideally an FBU rep or a colleague – to bear witness."

While both Sue and Peter at least both worked in the same city, firefighter Chris Higgins, a father of two, faces the problem experienced by many of travelling long distances to work.

With a family back in Merseyside, he's been working as a firefighter for the past ten years in London.

"I work in London and live 200 miles away – Merseyside. We have three kids – the two youngest eight and 12 years old. I head back north on my days off, although I lose one of the four days travelling. When I sought work in London there wasn't any in Merseyside. I've been working for ten years now in London – I was told, do five years and then seek a transfer. In 1999, that's what I did.

"Five years on from then and I'm still here in London. Last year I wrote a six-page letter to Merseyside – they responded in four lines, offering no hope. Even my wife writes to Merseyside Fire Authority.

"I'll keep following this one up, though. Some of my watch here live in Norfolk and they seem to spend forever on the road. I know lads who live in Liverpool too. I can't be the only one in this situation."

Certainly, there are firefighters who find the job today, and certain shift systems in particular, suits a family life. Mark Parthes from Notts, whose partner is a nurse, has a nine-month old and another on the way.

"I can't say I have any concerns about meeting my responsibilities as a father and an employees of the service. I took my two weeks statutory parental leave. And things work quite well between myself and my wife, who is a nurse. In terms of balancing my work and family responsibility, I'm quite happy with the (two 9s, two 15s) shift system we have in Nottinghamshire."

Mark's comment about his shift system, which is similar to those in some other brigades, chimes with the sentiment of a resolution passed at

the FBU conference in May (see over). However, delegates also agreed that "members do feel that some flexibility (within that type of shift system) may be required at some stages of their children's lives."

Some members are now seeking to use the flexible working provisions in the Grey Book by, for example, moving to shift patterns that suit their family commitments, and the union encourages all members who feel this would be beneficial to do so.

"Ultimately," says Vicky, "we want to make sure members know what their rights as parents are. And we recognise that parents, like children, are all individuals. Their situations, personal and financial are always very different.

"We will continue to work to ensure employers respect this when making decisions over requests for flexibility."

matters

childcare costs of over £7,300 per year, per child and in some parts of the country, over £10,000 per year, according to the Daycare Trust charity, the union is encouraging fire authorities to offer financial help through initiatives such as child care vouchers (see over for more details). Working with the FBU, Humberside fire authority, for example, is soon to start offering them.

But inertia in embracing family-friendly policies is strong in the service. "Sadly," says Sue, "fire authorities have been dragged kicking and screaming into the modern world, thanks to new legislation and, primarily the pressure from the FBU."

Moreover, fire authorities are often not as keen as they should be in promoting the new rights that parents enjoy.

"I think things have changed for the better, but I don't think firefighters today know their parental rights – let

What's in the Grey

Maternity

Pregnant employees should expect to be treated in a way that is sensitive to their circumstances and should not in any way be singled out for inferior treatment...Pregnant women and new mothers have a statutory entitlement not to be exposed to risks that could harm either themselves or their unborn child....at the point when her doctor advises her that she can no longer perform her current duties, or work her current pattern of hours, the employee should be consulted immediately over appropriate changes. In either case she shall continue to receive her normal pay. Similarly, on her return to work following the birth and normal maternity leave, there may be a period during which a change in duties or pattern of working hours would be appropriate, again depending on medical advice, in which case the member's normal pay would continue to apply.

In order to maximise the effectiveness of health protection through an individual risk assessment an employee should notify the fire and rescue authority as soon as possible after she becomes aware of her pregnancy....in any event... at least twenty-one days before her absence begins or as soon as is reasonably practicable:

Ante-natal care

Pregnant employees are entitled to paid time off to attend for ante-natal care, including relaxation and parentcraft classes... Fire and rescue authorities may wish to give sympathetic consideration, subject to the exigencies of the service, to reasonable time off for partners to attend ante-natal, relaxation and parentcraft classes.

Maternity leave

An employee who has less than twenty-six weeks' continuous local government service at the end of the fifteenth week before the expected week of childbirth

(EWC) shall be entitled to remain absent for up to twenty-six weeks. The employee may then take further leave without pay at the discretion of the fire and rescue authority. An employee who has at least twenty-six weeks' continuous local government service at the end of the fifteenth week before the EWC shall be entitled to twenty-six weeks' ordinary maternity leave with pay (see paragraph 18 below) and up to twenty-six weeks' additional maternity leave.

Maternity pay

An employee who has less than a year's continuous local government service at the beginning of the eleventh week before the EWC shall be entitled to Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP). An employee who has completed at least a year's continuous local government service at the eleventh week before the EWC shall be entitled to the following:

1. For the first six weeks of absence, nine-tenths of a week's pay offset against SMP, or Maternity Allowance (MA) for employees not eligible for SMP.
2. Where she has declared an intention to return to work, half a week's pay for the subsequent twelve weeks, without deduction except by the extent to which the combined pay and SMP (or MA and any dependants' allowances if she is not eligible for SMP) exceeds full pay.
3. For the remaining eight weeks, SMP if she is eligible.
4. Where she does not intend to return to work, SMP for the subsequent twenty weeks.
5. Payments under (2) shall be on the understanding that the employee shall return to work for at least three months, which may be varied by the fire and rescue authority on good cause being shown. In the event of her not returning to work, the fire and rescue authority may require her to refund all or part of the payments made. Payments made to the employee by way of SMP are not refundable.



Right to return to work

... the employee shall have the right to return to the job in which she was employed under her original contract of employment and on terms and conditions not less favourable than those that would have been applicable if she had not been absent...

Maternity/paternity leave

An employee with less than twenty-six weeks' continuous local government service at the fourteenth week before the EWC and who is the child's father, the expectant mother's partner or the expectant mother's nominated carer shall be entitled to a week's paid maternity support

ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2005

FLEXIBLE WORKING

(NWC amended by GMC)

Members working in the Fire Service repeatedly state that they enjoy the 2.2.4 shift system which they find family friendly. However, they do feel that some flexibility may be required at some stages of their children's lives. According to the Department of Trade and Industry, the Government is committed to helping working parents and as such all have a right to apply to work flexibly and their Employers have a statutory duty to consider those requests seriously.

This Conference calls upon the Executive Council to provide guidance to Brigade Officials to better enable them to assist all members when they make such applications and in any subsequent appeals where appropriate.

Book?

leave (which shall equate to seven consecutive days free from duty). A nominated carer is the person nominated by the mother to assist in the care of the child and to provide support to the mother at or around the time of the birth. An employee who has at least twenty-six weeks' continuous local government service at the fourteenth week before the EWC shall in addition be entitled to a further week's leave (to be taken immediately following the first week) paid at the Statutory Paternity Pay (SPP) rate.

Parental leave

An employee who has successfully completed initial training (or has at least a year's service if that is sooner) and who is one of the following shall be entitled to up to thirteen calendar weeks' unpaid parental leave (eighteen weeks if the child has a disability) in parts or in a block following the birth or adoption of a child ... [if they are] the mother, father, legal guardian, adoptive parent or any other nominated carer...

At the end of parental leave the employee is guaranteed the right to return to his or her current post if the leave was for a period of four weeks or less. If the leave was for a longer period the employee is entitled to return to his or her current post or, if that is not practicable, a similar post that has the same or better status, terms and conditions as the current post.

Flexible working

In order to assist in managing the balance between work and family life, employees with children under the age of six, or eighteen in the case of a disabled child, have the right to apply to the fire and rescue authority to work flexibly. The authority has a duty under the Employment Rights Act 1996 (as amended by the Employment Act 2002) to consider such requests seriously in line with a set procedure, and will be able to refuse requests only where there are clear business grounds for doing so.

Time off for dependants

An employee is entitled to take a reasonable amount of unpaid time off during his or her working hours in order to take action that is necessary to care for a dependant.... To deal with an incident that involves an employee's child and which occurs unexpectedly in a period during which an educational establishment that the child attends is responsible for him or her...to deal with unexpected termination or disruption of care arrangements

Links:

www.worksmart.org.uk
www.daycaretrust.org.uk
www.ncma.org.uk
www.childcarelink.gov.uk
www.maternityalliance.org.uk
www.hmrc.gov.uk

FINANCIAL HELP FOR YOUR FAMILY

Child Benefit A benefit for people bringing up children, paid for each child (under 16 or 19 if in full time education) and not affected by income or savings, it is worth £17.00 per week for the eldest child from 11/04/05 and for each other child £11.40 per week. For more information, visit www.hmrc.gov.uk/childbenefit/ or ring 0845 302 1444 (0845 603 2000 Northern Ireland).

Child Trust Fund CHILDREN BORN on or after September 1, 2002 will receive £250 for a special Child Trust Fund (CTF) account set up by the Government. Parents of children living in the UK, and in receipt of child benefit, will be sent a voucher by the Government which can then be used to open an account which is kept in trust for their child until he/she reaches 18. Children in families on low incomes will receive an extra payment and the Government will make a further contribution when your child is seven. For more information, visit www.childtrustfund.gov.uk or ring 0845 302 1470.

Childcare vouchers Some fire authorities, such as Humberside, are establishing a childcare voucher scheme, and the FBU encourages this since both employees and employers gain. Childcare vouchers work using a salary sacrifice scheme that allows an employee to give up the right to receive part of their salary in exchange for childcare vouchers (usually via a childcare voucher company who employer contracts to administer the scheme). Childcare vouchers can only be used to pay for childcare with a registered childminder or nursery registered with the childcare voucher company used by your employer. The employer deducts the amount paid out in vouchers, to a maximum of £50 per week, from the employee's taxable salary. This is exempt of tax and national insurance for both the employer and employee. So there are tax savings for the majority of working parents. For more information contact your fire authority or local FBU rep

Means-tested help There is also means-tested help available for parents towards the cost of bringing up children and towards childcare costs for working parents is the Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit. These were introduced in April 2003 and replaced the Working Families' Tax Credit, Disabled Person's Tax Credit and Children's Tax Credit.

Child Tax Credit Parents can receive help towards the general costs associated with bringing up children and could be eligible for this help whether you are working or not. The amount of help parents' receive will depend on their circumstances. Families with incomes of up to £59,000 could still be eligible for some help, and this income level rises to £66,000 for those families who have a child under the age of one. Child Tax Credit is paid directly into the bank account of the main carer, rather than through the wage packet.

Working Tax Credit This provides a top up to wages for those on low incomes. Extra support is available for working parents (see section below on the childcare element) and for disabled people in work. Most sections of the Working Tax Credit are paid through pay packets, or directly to those who are self employed. The amount people receive depends on their circumstances.

Childcare and Working Tax Credit Extra help is available through a childcare element within the Working Tax Credit for working parents to assist with the cost of registered and approved childcare. It can offer up to 70% towards the costs of childcare up to a maximum level of £175 per week for one child and £300 per week for two or more children – so if you have one child in childcare you could receive up to a maximum of £122.50 per week and with two or more children in childcare you could receive up to £210 per week.

To be eligible for the childcare element of Working Tax Credit

- lone parents must work 16 hours or more per week
- for couples, both partners must work 16 hours or more or
- one partner must work 16 hours or more per week if the other is incapacitated, in hospital or in prison

The childcare element of the Working Tax Credit is paid direct alongside Child Tax Credit payments to the main carer, rather than through the pay packet.

For more information visit www.taxcredits.inlandrevenue.gov.uk or call the Tax Credit helpline on 0845 300 3900.

The FBU has been involved in the roll-out of high volume pumps designed to counter threats involving water and to boost firefighting. Peter Gouldon and Paul Matthewman report.

THE NEW Dimension programme is the response of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (ODPM) to the government's civil contingencies capabilities programme. Its aim is to enhance UK preparedness and resilience by improving the capability of the UK fire and rescue service to respond to major and catastrophic incidents.

In order to counter the threat from a number of water-related scenarios the programme is providing high volume pumps (HVPs), which are to be strategically positioned around the country and can be used in the following situations:

Natural Flooding. Flooding is becoming an increasing problem and causes widespread damage and disruption to areas and can often affect a large number of locations simultaneously. HVPs will enhance the ability of fire and rescue services (F&RS) to assist in mitigating the effect of flooding working jointly with the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), which is the lead agency for flooding.

Deliberate Flooding. It is recognised that there is a risk of individuals or organisations deliberately instigating flooding events throughout the UK. HVPs will enhance the capability of F&RS in mitigating the effects of such an incident by working alongside the water undertakers and the Environment agency.

Firefighting Duties. HVPs can enhance the existing capabilities of English brigades to pump high volumes of water for firefighting. Where incidents occur on an unprecedented scale or where several incidents occur simultaneously, affecting the volume or pressure of the local water supply, HVPs will provide additional resilience and capability to supply water to the fire-ground.

What does a HVP consist of?

The HVP consists of two modules – one containing a pump and hose-box housed on a common module and a second module containing two hose-boxes. Each hose box contains 1km of 150mm delivery hose.

Each module is equipped with ancillary equipment to set up a number of water supply scenarios, including the ability to supply water to conventional fire pumps, hose and hose fittings through the standard instantaneous

High volume pumps

BARRY BATCHLOR/PA/EMPICS





Boscastle, Cornwall, August 2004: Flooding is becoming an increasing problem



coupling. The modules also include a hose retrieval unit so that the hose can be recovered mechanically following deployment utilising the carrying vehicle. Both modules will be transported and operated by a New Dimension prime mover. The pump has the capacity to pump 8,000 litres per minute over a distance of up to 3km and from a depth of 60 metres.

The FBU has been involved in this process through the New Dimension sub-committee of the FBU's National Health and Safety Committee.

Training

Training has been provided by the ODPM for up to five HVP instructors per vehicle. This allows for one per watch plus one other, if required. However a minimum of two instructors per brigade is required to enable a safe system of work during some elements of the instruction. This is carried out at the Fire Service College over a two week period. The course covers driving, laden and unladen, hook-lift operation, (accredited and certified by an external training provider), water safety level 1, manual handling, and seven days of high volume pumping.

The delegates will then provide HVP instruction to crews in their respective brigades. The driving and hook-lift is provided in brigades by an external accredited company.

Roll -out

The first ten HVPs were rolled out in early March this year in Derbyshire, Durham, London, Berkshire, Staffordshire, GMC, North Yorkshire, Somerset, Norfolk and Mid and West Wales. The plan is for a further 40 to be distributed around the UK in two batches of 20, starting in autumn this year and early 2006.

PAUL MATTHEWMAN (Region 4) and Pete Gouldon (Region 7) have both undertaken the driver training, hook-lift training and the instructors course in an attempt to better understand the complexities of HVP and have both been involved in the process of rolling out HVPs from the early stages, reporting back to the FBU National Health & Safety Committee.

Despite a lack of help from government, a number of brigades have recently decided to grasp the nettle and launch recruitment campaigns to tackle scandalous shortages in the retained service.



Luke Hawkins (left) and Steve Riding – visited at their workshop

Closing the employment gap

THE RECRUITMENT of firefighters working the retained duty system has long required special attention and last autumn the FBU threw down the gauntlet to government by challenging it to provide additional funding and take national action to tackle a massive nationwide shortage.

We are still waiting for the government to assume its responsibilities. Doing nothing is not an option. With UK society changing at a rapid pace, particularly the longer hours at greater distances from their homes that people work, the service is struggling to maintain the optimum employment levels of many fire stations.

The service has not in any way declined as a result. But existing personnel have had to pick up the slack if there are not enough retained firefighters on call. This is particularly telling in areas such as Cornwall and Oxfordshire where the percentage of the retained personnel to wholetime is significant.

Two thirds of firefighters in Cornwall are retained and in Oxfordshire 18 out of 24 stations are entirely staffed by retained personnel. Traditionally, retained firefighters were recruited by a method of osmosis, whereby sons followed fathers into the service or communities that were a lot more closeknit generated a steady flow of applicants.

Those days are long gone and it's only now that certain brigades are making moves to institute a structured and proactive approach to recruitment. Tony Whiting, the recruitment officer and a retained station manager in the Oxfordshire brigade, has grasped the bull by the horns and in the last six months has carried out a whole series of integrated measures that have reaped huge rewards in bringing in new blood to his brigade.

"From my experience gained in working in the media I understood how we could reach the right type of person," he says. "I was looking for individuals who at some stage had thought 'maybe I could be a firefighter'. So

I started approaching our local TV, radio and press outlets, but I didn't do it all at once. I wanted to find out how effective each branch of the media was in bringing people in so I gave different stories to the TV, radio and newspapers, at different times – so I could quantify the response. I set up my own system of point awarding so I could see where my efforts were bearing most fruit."

Six months down the line and Tony has recruited 60 retained firefighters from all walks of life. Oxfordshire has 18 totally retained stations out of 24 so it was paramount that the recruitment process improved in order to keep pace with their high turnover of staff.

John Hurren, the Deputy Chief Fire Officer, says they were determined to approach the matter of retained recruitment in a modern and progressive way: "I've worked in several brigades, and I've been here six years, and I can safely say this brigade is easily the most modern and forward thinking in its approach," he says. "We took the retained recruitment model first developed in South Wales and adapted it for ourselves. We realised society – and particularly our county – had changed and we had to be more proactive in the recruitment of retained personnel. No longer were they just going to walk in the door.

"So now we aim to provide as much help as possible to potential recruits and to encourage as broad a section of the community as possible to consider the retained service.

"For example, in order to encourage women to become retained personnel we help with childcare and I fully expect in the future we may well establish station creches. Such understanding of the needs of the community means that we have one team of retained firefighters that is entirely female.

"In addition, we've changed the way the retained personnel are paid. No longer are they

**Oxfordshire, Cornwall,
Devon, Hampshire and
West Yorkshire have all
launched recruitment
campaigns in the last year**

paid on how many shouts they attend. We now work on a 108-hour week and firefighters are paid by the number of hours they are on call. It's very much a new model which is working for us ... as our retained staff prefer this new scheme as it guarantees their pay and makes the job more attractive. We know other brigades are watching to see how it goes."

The county of Oxfordshire benefits from almost full employment and is a relatively wealthy area of the UK. The demographic of the population shows a high degree of mobility



John Hurren – society has changed

and income and this has presented problems in attracting retained personnel.

"High employment levels, people living in dormitory towns and commuting to London and all doing reasonably well-paid jobs has made it harder to attract retained firefighters," says Vivien Trafford, who as community safety and human resources manager for the brigade, well understands the problems that Tony Whiting faced.

"We were suffering from a very high turnover of personnel as people enjoyed the benefits and the flexibility of a successful local economy. So people either worked too far from the station or were changing jobs and moving out of the area. It was a major problem."

Tony Prosser, the personnel and development manager, who Tony Whiting reports to was directly responsible for finding a solution.

"Prior to Tony Whiting we had an external consultant with a sales and marketing background and it didn't really work out as she didn't have the knowledge of the retained service. Whereas Tony is not only a retained firefighter but has the experience necessary to generate the media campaigns that draw people in."

So far it's been a huge success. Tony's campaign has not only garnered the media coverage that is essential to drawing in potential new recruits. He has also pursued other avenues such as approaching schools to get the kids to take home leaflets to their parents. While head teachers were initially surprised to see him, once he'd explained what he was about they were only too glad to help their local community.

But it's not just about getting them through the door. Tony's approach has been totally inclusive and always presented with a human face. During every aspect of the recruit-

ment process, from the initial first meeting through the series of mental, physical and psychometric tests, he sticks closely to the potential firefighters.

"I realise that for some people – while they may want to become a firefighter – they may need help in adjusting to the culture, which can be very different to their work environment. Also, we find that some people need a little encouragement in order to get through what they initially see as quite a rigorous recruitment process."

A case in point is 20-year-old toolmaker Luke Hawkins from Aylesbury. He was attracted to the service when one of his local firefighters dropped in to his workshop looking for potential recruits. He, and his colleague, 41-year-old Steve Riding both thought it sounded good and applied. However, Luke is dyslexic and failed the written tests. But Tony felt he was the kind of guy he was looking for and believed that Luke had the ability and the temperament to succeed in the retained service. So he followed him up and persuaded him to come and take the tests again – but this time Tony

**'We're not getting any
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spent half an hour just explaining how the tests were set, what they were trying to achieve and suggested some alternative ways for Luke to approach some of the psychometric problems. And it worked. Luke passed and is now in the heart of the recruitment process and expects to join the service in a couple of months.

"When Graham Turner came to the workshop and started explaining the job I thought it sounded really exciting ... and it would fit in with my current job. The recruitment process has been very interesting so far. I look at it as a challenge – as I've had to work hard to get my standards up."

As for Steve Riding – he's fulfilling a lifelong ambition. He always wanted to be a firefighter but when he came to leave school was encouraged to get a trade and so became a toolmaker. Now, in his early forties, he's finally got to where he always wanted to be.

"It was what I wanted to do when I left school. But it got drummed into me that you've got to get a trade ... do an apprenticeship before you do anything ... and so it sort of went by-the-by until Graham Turner, one of the



Tony Whiting – I understood how we could reach the right type of person

local firefighters walked through the door of this workshop ... and then I got thinking about it again.

"I enjoyed the whole recruitment process and I can't wait to get out there ... I wish I'd done it sooner. Everyone I've met in the fire service has been fantastic – and particularly Tony. It's exceeded my expectations. And I don't know how much we get paid ... It's not why I'm doing it. I'm doing it for my own satisfaction and for the good of the community."

Steve's just waiting to do his safe to ride test ... he'd been a firefighter for two weeks when we spoke to him and said it feels great.

Tony's proactive and very often pastoral

methods have undoubtedly paid dividends not only in nurturing talent that might have fallen by the wayside, but also by reaching all corners of the county. As Tony Prosser says: "By September this year we will have 100 per cent availability. It'll be the highest crew levels this brigade has ever had."

Similar results have been achieved in Cornwall where regional roadshows have been staged in which the public has been invited into the local stations to have a go at basis drills such as hose running, maybe do some physical tests and generally talk through the nature of the job in a relaxed and informal manner.

Davinia Grist, the publicity manager, who's

been at the heart of the campaign, says that existing retained personnel play a key part in finding the new recruits.

"We're not getting any guidance nationally so we just set up our own system. We did posters, flyers and postcards which we got the local stations to give out. The retained stations then went out into the community to talk to employers emphasising the value of having retained firefighters on the staff – they bring skills into the workplace such as first aid and fire prevention knowledge.

"We then encouraged members of the public to come to the stations ... and for those that were seriously interested we assigned them mentors amongst the retained personnel."

Derek Walker, Assistant Divisional Officer responsible for retained recruitment, became involved in giving presentations to the people who turned up at the roadshows and set the tone for the campaign.

"We encouraged retained station managers to be proactive in the community. The local stations are encouraged to get the word around in their village.

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"In Mullion we got lucky – one of the local postmen is a retained firefighter ... so he helped us target the leafleting. For example, he'd say there's no point in dropping one in there because they're pensioners or definitely do that house as they're a young couple and we had a very good response. We got three really good people from that one mailshot. This is one of the most effective methods. We've had at least 12 people per roadshow as result of these mailshots."

Davinia, as part of her role, targets the local media, who have been very receptive to the campaign.

"We had West Country TV and Pirate Radio on the last campaign. One lad turned up at a station 20 minutes after he'd seen news of the campaign on TV. The newspapers particularly are very responsive as they realise that this is a key issue for the local community – in other words their readers."

So although approached in a slightly different manner, the Cornwall campaign has been as effective as that in Oxfordshire, in that 100 per cent availability will be achieved, the brigade says. Not only was Derek delighted



Davinia Grist and Derek Walker – encouraged members of the public to visit stations

with the response but the cross-section of applicants was satisfyingly diverse.

"From the six roadshows in Penzance, Redruth, Camborne, Perranporth, Mullion and Liskeard we found 40 people and I'm confident we'll fill all 10 vacancies. Plus we'll have a database of people that we can draw on in the future.

"We've had all sorts of people mechanics, students, lifeguards, graphic designers, ex-military – a really wide range of people. Oh, and supermarket workers, as we targeted the large supermarket chains. Their management was very responsive."

Cornwall's Deputy Chief Fire Officer Steve Webster is equally happy with the results but feels more could certainly be done to improve the recruitment of retained firefighters.

"In the past we've found it very difficult to recruit retained firefighters, mainly because people can't meet the conditions of employment such as proximity to the station and availability. Our new campaign was designed to encourage people to come and have a look at us and see if they might fit in.

"We've tailored our campaign to the needs of Cornwall, but a national campaign would certainly help in explaining to the general public what exactly a retained firefighter is. The majority of people have no inkling that the role exists. When we turn up at a fire the public



just see firefighters and if the word retained ever comes up many people assume it's some kind of voluntary work!"

A handful of other counties have also grasped the nettle and gone in search of new retained recruits. Devon, Hampshire and West Yorkshire have all launched similar campaigns in the last year.

Pete Lavine, the retained liaison manager for West Yorkshire, says there are certain areas where it's extremely tough to find new recruits. "Hebden Bridge is a nightmare. It's become a very affluent area with people actually commuting to London on a daily basis, which seems madness to me, but of course rules them out from ever working in their community.

"We have more luck in the less affluent areas, to be honest. We've done leaflet drops, radio and newspaper PR campaigns, open days and awareness days and so far the response has been pretty good.

"We've got 14 retained stations that pretty much all need new retained recruits, so we're still recruiting heavily."

With little or no direction coming from the government – despite the on-going campaign from the FBU – the UK's brigades are having to adapt to the fluid nature of the current labour market, and the reduced ties many people now have with their local community. It's a challenge the best of them are meeting head on.



Serving the

Steve Rose, SDO, Cornwall Brigade tells Firefighter about the challenges of his job

IN THE best traditions of the Fire Service – from the days when a strong naval influence held sway – Steve Rose followed his father and his grandfather into the business of fighting fires. As a young man on the Channel Island of Alderney he signed up as a retained firefighter as soon as he became eighteen. These early years of service provided him with the touchstone for a career spanning 17 years as a (wholetime) firefighter. Now, as a Senior Divisional Officer in the Cornwall brigade he takes pride in serving his community.

‘I feel a strong sense of responsibility to the community – and always have done. From the time

I was a retained firefighter on the Channel Islands I felt great pride in being part of the service. My understanding of the effects of fire in a local community informs the job I do every day. I know how a death can have a seismic impact in a small community.’

And yet it took Steve three goes to realise his dream of becoming wholetime. When his family moved to

the first stage. Another year went by and he was working as an apprentice mechanic, when his father, who realised how much he wanted to be a firefighter persuaded him to try one more time.

‘My dad saw an ad and suggested I try – third time lucky – and I got in. There were over 2,000 applicants

I feel a strong sense of responsibility to the community - and always have done...from the time I was a retained firefighter on the Channel Islands

because in those days in a rural community like Cornwall, firefighters were paid a very competitive wage. I was ecstatic.’

Having worked his way up through the ranks Steve now occupies one of the toughest positions in the service. As usually the highest ranked FBU member in a brigade, SDOs very often have to live in two camps. On the one hand they’re fully paid up union members, and on the other they’re a level of management that is expected to enact the strategic commands of their more senior officers. Steve particularly is heavily involved in strategic matters around IRMPs and the work involved on combating asymmetrical terrorism.

‘Even in a rural brigade like Cornwall we’ve seen a lot of money and resources come into the county because of the need to be fully prepared for all eventualities such as CCBRN (Conventional, Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear). And we’ve particularly seen an increase in our ability to deal with chemical incidents.’

In spite of occupying a post that could present certain workplace contradictions, Steve says he’s very much a square peg in a square hole. ‘I’m lucky in that I can shape the job I do. I’ve very much designed the role I fulfil – so I’m very happy with what I spend my days doing.’

Recently, due to changes amongst the principal

I don’t see the proposals for regional controls and modernisation as improving the service. I don’t think the existing system is faultless, no system is perfect – but it is far from broke

Cornwall he applied to the service only to be rejected for not being a Cornishman. At the time, you had to be born locally in order to work for your community fire service. The second time he applied he didn’t even get through

community

officers Steve had to step up and fill the Assistant Chief Fire Officer role for a temporary period of seven months. And he very much enjoyed the added responsibility.

'I'm a part of the strategic team so it wasn't too much of a change for me when I had to step up and fill in as a temporary Assistant Chief Fire Officer. I was used to doing the political side – working with councillors, committees, etc and planning resilience and corporate risk.'

However, he fully admits that some of his skills on the political side do help him with the job of being an effective SDO and union member. So how does he

welfare of victims, and help in the coordination of potential investigations – as there may be a crime scene. It's basically a matter of dealing with logistics, talking to the police or quite simply making sure people are fed and watered. It's a reasonably frequent occurrence that I go out on a shout ... and when I'm there my role is to be divorced from the frontline in order to deal with these type of things.'

In his strategic role within the Cornish brigade Steve is all too aware of the need for constant modernisation of the service. With ever increasing developments

in technology and new techniques of fighting fires, it's essential that he keeps up with what's happening in the wider field of firefighting.

'The service has changed a lot in my seventeen years as a wholetime firefighter. Gone are the days of yellow leggings and hand held radios ... we've become far more

technical. Consequently, we're also more effective than we used to be and it's now a lot safer for firefighters on the job. Innovations such as PPV (Positive Pressure Ventilation) is just such a development. We can now force feed air into a building to try to suppress fires and thus reducing the risk to the firefighters. Also, we now use water in a very different way. It's more scientific ... so that the size of water droplets can be varied. This means we no longer go and steam a building with a deluge of water ... now we can put out a fire with very little water damage. Plus, we now have the use of thermal imaging cameras as a front line appliance – the advantages of which are obvious. It's brought a massive improvement in firefighter safety.'

But modernisation in terms of technology is one thing – what about the term when it's brandished by Nick Raynsford the Minister for Local and Regional

As a 39-year-old family man, a father of two boys, aged 12 and 9, and as an honorary Cornishman Steve Rose has only the good of the residents of the county in the forefront of his mind

reconcile a management role within the Fire Service with being an FBU member? 'The way the fire service operates in Cornwall, there's not a big stick that requires union representation ... or not. Unionisation isn't an issue on a day-to-day basis. The dispute brought this issue to the fore ... because we weren't sure who would go on strike or not. As an individual, when I joined the fire service – I joined the union, and am happy with that. I don't think it adversely affects any promotion I might seek as I've known many Principal Officers and even one Deputy Chief Fire Officer who belonged to the FBU.'

As one of the main conduits between his local fire authority and the brigade, Steve is well versed in all the issues affecting the Cornwall service and very much enjoys interaction with his local councillors. 'Our fire authority is a relatively small organisation. We have 79 members and they operate with an executive and cabinet approach. We also deal with specific panels handling key issues – so the scrutiny process is very robust. I deal with the IRMP panel and advise members on comprehensive performance assessment. We interact heavily as a department with the County Council ... we try and get the largest slice of cake we can from the corporate budget. But we fully appreciate that the council has to prioritise its resources ... they've a tough job.'

Steve broadly works a 9 to 5, sometimes starting early, sometimes working late. As part of a brigade with 206 wholetime firefighters, 425 retained and 120 non-uniformed personnel, he's part of the flexible duty system and so works approximately 68 hours a week. There are six flexible duty officers at any one time and so of course he still goes out to incidents.

'I still go to fires and incidents but don't tend to get my hands dirty. Although, depending on the size of the problem ... a lot of us can be out ... including the Chief. For example, during the nationally covered floods we had at Boscastle recently the incident commanders on scene were the Deputy and Chief Fire Officer.'

'My role at an incident would be to provide overall health and safety for everyone there, look after the

There is a very strong local identity here and it's a major plus if you're providing a front line service because people have a strong feeling for their community

Government, with its far more sinister connotations, such as regionalisation of control centres, reduced numbers crewing appliances and with all the attendant implications of job losses? How does this sit with a lifelong union member who's also an upwardly mobile middle manager with potential to go higher?

At this point I can see why Steve is so adept at working with politicians. He chooses his words very carefully. 'The brigade is an unwilling participant in the move to regional controls. We just don't know how robust a system would

be ... there are too many questions and not enough answers. But we have to keep talking in order to make sure we get the best out of whatever situation arises.'

'We're backed up by the local council who also say the outline business case doesn't stand up and so they're not endorsing the move to regionalisation. However, they, and we, realise that this can be imposed. So we're an unwilling participant but we feel we have to sit at the table and discuss it. You've got to prepare yourself for

We interact heavily as a department with the County Council ... we try and get the largest slice of cake we can from the corporate budget. But we fully appreciate that the council has to prioritise its resources ... they've a tough job

the worst case scenario and if it happens you have to be up to speed. Representation has been made at both Chief Officer and fire authority level to say we do not support these moves.'

And what of being a member of the FBU, who are actively campaigning against regionalisation and government 'modernisation' ... and being a middle manager? As a senior divisional officer, how does that potential conflict of interest sit with Steve?

'It's very simple. If I'm given a lawful order by a superior officer ... I have to carry it out. That's what I've been trained to do, what I've always done, and will always do.

'If there are any [negative] changes to the fire service in this country it won't be central government that suffers the loss – it will be the community. It's not a nice debate.

'The government's proposals have been shown to cost more money than is currently being spent and they are claiming the changes will improve resilience and the overall service. My personal view is that I don't see the proposals for regional controls and modernisation as improving the service. I don't think the existing system is faultless, no system is perfect – but it is far from broke. And as for their claims over improved resilience, well, I have many concerns over these ...'

As a 39-year-old family man, a father of two boys, aged 12 and 9, and as an honorary Cornishman Steve Rose has only the good of the residents of the county in the forefront of his mind. As an eight year resident of the town of Wadebridge Steve, like he has all his life, lives and works at the epicentre of what keeps this rural community as safe as possible. As we sit talking about possible changes to the service he loves and the thorny contradiction of being a union member and a possible instrument of government change, you can see the steely resolve of a man who feels he will always do what is right.

'You could ask Nick Raynsford the same questions you've asked me. I would hope his rationale is for the best interests of the fire service and the country. Us and the FBU have to ask the question of Mr Raynsford 'have you considered all the angles?' We have to play the devil's advocate and say 'hang on a minute' before you steam-roller through these proposals. We have to look these changes in the face ... and make the service work. I believe the FBU and the fire service management are on the same side. You won't find a union official who won't say community safety has got to be the top of their agenda ... and that ultimately has a very positive effect on firefighter safety. I think it's definitely a partnership ...'

Steve obviously loves this part of the world and wants to further his career in the brigade which he knows so well. He quotes Mick Howells (his outgoing Chief Fire Officer) as saying that every dedicated firefighter becomes a mistress to the service – and he agrees. But adds that what makes such dedication easier is if you also feel part of a strong and clearly defined community. 'A lot of people in Cornwall feel they are different from the rest of the country. They see the Tamar river as a natural divide. They see Cornwall as being out on a limb. There is a very strong local identity here and it's a major plus if you're providing a front line service because people have a strong feeling for their community. We don't have any large urbanised areas ... there is a friendlier attitude. Public services are generally looked at as the good guys. That's all good stuff for us. It enables us to engage the community in what we do and with our issues.

'I feel sad when I see firefighters being attacked by people in the community. Firefighters put their lives on the line to save whoever is in peril. Even if someone is having a go at you, you still try to do your best to help them. People do the job because they get an immense sense of satisfaction out of it ... and I feel very lucky to be living and working in Cornwall.'

'The service has changed a lot in my seventeen years as a wholetime firefighter. Gone are the days of yellow leggings and hand held radios ... we've become far more technical. It's brought a massive improvement in firefighter safety.'

Steve's applying for the vacant position of Assistant Chief Fire Officer that becomes available in April with the retirement of Chief Fire Officer Mick Howell. He says Mick Howell has always been supportive of officers who are unionised, but then he knew he was retiring. Steve doesn't say it but it's a universal maxim that new regimes can bring new challenges. However, he seems to have a handle on it, like everything else on his watch.

On his third
trip to Iraq,
Brian Joyce
visited the
oil-rich
region of Kurdistan.



There he met many
poorly-equipped and
trained firefighters,
proud in their jobs but
in much need of help.



MY JOURNEY through Turkey was coming to an end. We were close to Kurdistan. There stood mile after mile of empty petrol tankers and hundreds of the hungry beasts which had been queuing for hours at the border. Our reliance and need for petroleum became extremely visual after passing nearly 400 petrol tankers.

Abdullah Muhsin, the international representative of the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) was – as with my previous two trips to Iraq – acting as my interpreter as we travelled to Duhok with Jalal Kayef, President of the KSWU for the province of Duhok. He and several other officials, including my old friend Subdi Al-Mashadani, the General Secretary of the IFTU, joined us at the border.

Having been to Baghdad and Basra last year, I now had the opportunity to extend our relationship to the trade union movement in Kurdistan. The Kurdistan General Workers Syndicate Union is the equivalent to the Iraqi Federation of Trade Unions and has unions within

Kurdistan affiliated to it. These unions range from the building industry, mechanics and public services to transport, textiles and agriculture.

Meetings had been arranged in Duhok, Arbil and Sulaimania, each of these provinces having its own KWSU President. The unions affiliated also having their own President in each of the three provinces. The structure of the KWSU is currently under discussion. The debate is about unification and many believe this is the way forward and future for the KWSU

**We have,
as a union,
arranged for
approximately
1,250 sets
of fire kit to
be sent to
Kurdistan**

Training and education priority

I was warmly welcomed at each meeting. Officials were eager to explain the issues, problems and needs of their unions. Training and education is a priority and recognised by all as imperative for the future of not only their officials and members but for the unions themselves. Computers, printers and faxes were high on the list of requirements as well as financial help. These requests and needs are

Kurdistan

vitality important, but so is the necessity of a trade union delegation going to Iraqi Kurdistan this year.

My visit was also to assist in facilitating the first meeting of KWSU and IFTU. This has led to successful discussions between the two unions.

I felt safe and secure as I travelled through Kurdistan. Armed security was apparent and checkpoints frequent. With the history and relationship with Saddam's Iraq, it is not only understandable but desirable.

Kurdistan lies across the north of the country in a blanket of beautiful mountains. The Kurdish people have suffered imprisonment, torture and death at the hands of Saddam's Ba'athist party and military power. In the provinces of Duhok and Arbil over 5,000 villages were destroyed, thousands of people made homeless, countless numbers missing and killed, bombed, machined gunned, gassed, and poisoned by chemicals.

Since 1991 due to the intervention of the United Nations and the courage of the Kurdish people, the country has had the opportunity to build, improve and modernise. The difference those years have made is remarkable. It is a tribute to the people of Iraqi Kurdistan and gives hope to the people of Iraq for the future.

Firefighters unprotected

During my time in Kurdistan, I visited fire stations in all the provinces. Personal protective clothing was limited. In one station, there were six sets of personal protective clothing shared among the whole station of 30 firefighters.

There were requests from each brigade visited for technical information, fire kit and equipment. The need for all types of training was identified as a priority.

None of the stations I visited had breathing apparatus, although I was proudly shown some new appliances that had recently been delivered. As elsewhere in Iraq, these firefighters are not allowed to join a trade union due to existing legislation and it is unlikely this is going to change in the near future.

We have, as a union, arranged for approximately 1,250 sets of fire kit to be sent to Kurdistan.

But there is still a desperate need for further support and assistance. Above all, we must maintain and continue our relationship with those to whom we have held out the hand of trust and friendship.

However, there were no expectations from those I met. For these were not people who simply talk about freedom and democracy. Most have physically fought to achieve it and all have suffered under the regime of Saddam's Iraq for it.

The KWSU also arranged for me to meet the Governor of Duhok Nejerfan Ahmed and the political leader of the PDK

MUHAMMED URBABAP PHOTOGRAPHICS



Iraqi firefighters at a fire in a paper factory. Personal protective clothing is limited. In one station in Kurdistan, there were six sets among 30 firefighters.



Nuzad Ismail, trade union official and President of the IFTU in Kirkuk, has survived two recent assassination attempts

(Kurdistan Democratic Party), Khader Abdel-Aziz Rashied. I also met Abdul Razag, minister for humanitarian aid and a member of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan.

This series of meetings gave me the opportunity to question and explore the views of these officials over a variety of issues. One issue we discussed was the future of a federal Iraq and specifically the role of and political relationship with the trade union movement. The war and occupation have created debate. Views are now being expressed freely and openly by all. We also discussed the unjust and totally unnecessary legislation in relation to firefighters and their right to join a trade union, as well as the function and responsibilities of the fire service.

Interviews were arranged with two national television networks and several national newspapers. Television coverage of my trip appeared on the news for two nights, and was transmitted by satellite over all the Arab states.

As I travelled back from Suliamania, I couldn't help but notice the regeneration of the countryside. Ten years ago it was burnt beyond recognition by Saddam's air force. Now young saplings stood four foot high, and the blackened scorched earth replaced by fresh green. Yet my mind was still at the Red House in Suliamania.

Red House

Simply called the Red House due to its colour and quite unassuming in appearance, you could easily be forgiven for thinking it was an office block. But for thousands of those who walked across its courtyard, the Red House meant imprisonment, torture and execution. Now it is a museum, its walls displaying a pictorial history of those who had to flee their homes and escape to the mountains

bound



Red House: for thousands it meant imprisonment and torture, as depicted left, with electrodes for up to 48 hours, and execution. Now it is a museum.

Above: Pictures of families that were killed from villages that were entirely destroyed by Sadaam Hussein are displayed at the Red House

BRIAN JOYCE, an FBU EC member, visited Kurdistan in December 2004. In addition to remembering Hadi Saleh, Brian thanks all those who assisted in making his trip possible, in particular, those who made the vital contributions of fire kit to the firefighters of Kurdistan. His thanks also go to all those whom he met during his travels but has not named and, in particular, Jalal Kayif and his family for the particular friendship and kindness they showed him during his short time in their country. For more information, visit www.iraqitradeunions.org or www.tuc.org.uk (Iraq Appeal)

of Kurdistan. Many died in the freezing snow, both young and old. There were also pictures of families, mothers and fathers, daughters and sons who were murdered simply because they were born Kurdish.

Two days before Kurdish partisans attacked this building Saddam's regime executed all those held within its walls.

Life for many in Iraq is still unsafe. This is certainly the case for trade union official Nuzad Ismail President of the IFTU in Kirkuk. Nuzad has survived two assassination attempts on his life over recent months.

Each day he and his family receive death threats. As Nuzad said: "If they can't get to me they will get to my family – that's the way they work". He was referring to Saddam loyalists who are still active in the so-called "new resistance".

Sadly whilst writing this article I was made aware of the death of my friend Hadi Saleh, International Secretary for the IFTU. He was assassinated in January in Baghdad. Masked assassins broke into his home, bound his feet and hands, blindfolded him and then tortured, burnt and finally strangled Hadi with electric cord.

Not surprisingly there is the belief that Hadi's murder was carried out by Saddam's Mukhabarat, the Ba'athist KGB. Sadly there are those in the UK who not only give credibility to these murderers and cowards, but support them.

Hadi Saleh was a trade unionist, a man with a wish for a free and democratic federal Iraq. He worked through the trade union movement to achieve his beliefs for the people of Iraq.

At the age of 21, he was seized by Saddam's secret police and sentenced to summary execution for forming a trade union at his work place. Hadi spent five years of his life in the filth of one of Saddam's prisons, where he was tortured and beaten. But he had his sentence by some miracle commuted to permanent exile.

He opposed the war, and continued his work to unite the people of his country. But he never gave up his fight against Ba'athism. And for that he was murdered.

25-YEAR BADGES



Andy Ward, High Wycombe Red Watch, receives his 25 year badge from Danny Whitelock (left), Buckinghamshire Brigade Chair at time of presentation. Right is Brigade Secretary Gordon Richardson.



John McCourt (left) and George Orr (right) receive their 25 year badges from Hamilton branch chairman Davy Affleck

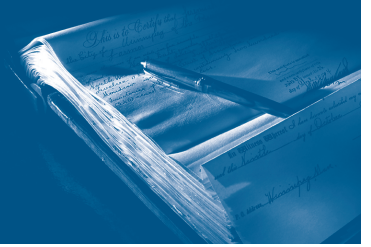


Sub/O Heath Price (right) receiving his 25 year badge from FF Julian Bradwell Branch Official from Abingdon Station



Dave Joyce (l) receives his 25 year badge from Trevor French (r) Brigade Chair at Barnstaple Fire Station

NEIGHBOUR DISPUTES



My neighbour is constantly making noise and plays loud music late at night. What can I do to stop this?

FIRSTLY approach the neighbour to settle matters amicably. If the problem continues consider putting your grievances in writing to them and if the neighbour is a tenant, write to the landlord also. Think about involving the police. Any ongoing problems need to be logged and it's best to keep a diary of events which may be useful to use as evidence in any future action.

For persistent problems, the complainant should contact the Environmental Health Officer at the local authority. They have powers under Section 80 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 (as amended by the Noise and Statutory Nuisance Act 1993), to deal with noise nuisances. This could result in them serving a noise abatement notice. If this is not complied with, they may prosecute in the Magistrates' court, where a maximum fine of £5000 may be imposed. Local authorities also have powers to seize noise making equipment

and/or apply for an injunction.

The local authority has a duty under s79 of the act to inspect the noise and therefore can be forced to do so if they refuse or don't appear very willing. The complainant would need to go through the internal complaints procedure at the local authority then possibly refer the matter onto the Local Government Ombudsman.

But, if the complainant wishes to take their own private action, they too can apply to the court under section 82 of the Act or take civil action. This can be expensive, and legal advice is likely to be necessary. At least 3 days written notice of intended action and details of the complaint needs to be sent to the person making the noise. If the complainant is successful he/she may obtain an injunction to stop the nuisance and/or win damages. Civil action may be taken against the person causing the noise for either nuisance or harassment, if the action is deliberate. Any legal action taken against a neighbour may have to be declared to any buyer if you decide to move. This could affect the price and the sale overall.

My neighbour has a large tree at the bottom of the garden which overhangs into mine. I am unsure if the tree is dangerous but I do not use that part of the garden in case one of the branches falls. What can I do about this legally, my neighbour won't discuss the issue.

THIS problem constitutes a nuisance as the overhanging tree is unlawfully interfering with the use and enjoyment of that part of the land. This can either be a civil or, in some cases, a criminal matter.

When branches overhang, it is also a form of trespass and the owner of the tree should be asked to cut it back. If they refuse, the complainant may legally cut the tree back to the boundary line only but must return any branches or fruit that falls from the tree as this still remains the property of the owner. The complainant is first advised to check with the local authority if the tree is subject to a preservation order as the tree may be protected from pruning/felling unless it is classed as a nuisance, dangerous or dead.

If evidence is obtained to show the tree is dangerous, because it is poisonous or could cause damage or injury, the tree owner will be liable to pay compensation for damages to anyone affected. In this case, the tree may also constitute a statutory nuisance and therefore

the local authority should be contacted and asked to serve a notice on the owner requiring them to cut it back, otherwise they will undertake the work themselves and recover the costs, although the Local Authority cannot legally be forced to get involved.

If the roots of a tree grow under another property, they too may be removed. This could be a matter that an insurance company may deal with if there is a likelihood damage may occur. If damage has already occurred, the tree owner is again liable to pay compensation but it must be shown that they knew or ought to have known of the potential danger. If leaves fall into a neighbouring garden, there is no legal remedy to stop this as it is a natural occurrence which cannot be reasonably prevented.

In any of these cases it is advisable to discuss the matter with the tree owner first and put any concerns in writing. If this does not work, a solicitor's letter is recommended. Ultimately, court action may be necessary although this can be costly and take a long time to resolve and it also creates bad feeling between neighbours. Also, this kind of dispute would have to be declared to anyone wanting to buy either property in the future, which may affect the sale or price. Before starting legal action it would be advisable to check with the building's insurers as they may be able to help with negotiations and costs or try and resolve the matter amicably.

0808 100 6061 FBU

freephone legal advice line



THOMPSON'S
SOLICITORS



The line provides advice for personal injury, family law, wills, conveyancing, personal finance and consumer issues. For disciplinary and employment-related queries contact your local FBU representative.

For further help and advice on union services contact your regional office

| Regional Office | Address | Telephone No. | Email address |
|--|---|---------------|------------------------------------|
| Region 1 Scotland | 52 St Enoch Square, Glasgow, Scotland, G1 4AA | 0141 221 2309 | 01rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 2 N. Ireland | 14 Bachelors Walk, Lisburn, Co Antrim, BT28 1XJ | 02892 664622 | 02rs@fbu.org |
| Region 3 Cleveland, Durham, Northumberland, Tyne and Wear | 1 Carlton Court, 5th Avenue, Team Valley, Gateshead, NE11 0AZ | 0191 487 4142 | 03rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 4 Yorkshire and Humberside | 9 Marsh Street, Rothwell, Leeds, LS26 0AG | 0113 288 7000 | 04rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 5 Greater Manchester, Lancashire, Isle of Man, Cumbria, Merseyside, Cheshire | The Lighthouse, Lower Mersey St, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire, CH65 2AL | 0151 357 4400 | 05rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 6 Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire, Lincolnshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire | 6 Bridgford Road, West Bridgford, Nottingham, NG2 6AB | 0115 982 7202 | 06gen@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 7 West Midlands, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Hereford and Worcester, Salop | 195/7 Halesowen Rd, Old Hill, West Midlands, B64 6HE | 01384 413633 | 07rs@fbu.org.uk |
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| Region 10 London | John Horner Mews, Frome Street, Islington, London, N1 8PB | 020 7359 3638 | london@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 11 Kent, Surrey, Sussex | Fire Station, Coldharbour Road, Northfleet, Kent, DA11 8NT | 01474 320473 | 11rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 12 Buckinghamshire, Berkshire, Hampshire, Oxfordshire, Isle of Wight | The Fire Station, St Mary Street, High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire, HP11 2HE | 01494 513034 | 12rs@fbu.org.uk |
| Region 13 Cornwall, Somerset, Devon, Avon, Gloucestershire, Wiltshire, Dorset | 158 Muller Road, Horfield, Bristol, BS7 9RE | 0117 935 5132 | 13rs@fbu.org.uk |

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